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ABSTRACT

This case study of a restructured high school in Baltimore, Maryland, demonstrates an approach to the education of gifted and talented students utilizing principles of the Coalition for Essential Schools, an education reform movement headed by Ted Sizer. The case study first examines Coalition principles, which call for a commitment to heterogeneous grouping and the elimination of all "special" classes (e.g., advanced placement and honors classes); then recounts the typical daily experiences of one talented tenth grader at the school; and, finally, reports teachers' responses to implementation of the Coalition principles at the restructured school. The nine coalition principles include viewing the student as a worker; mastery of a limited number of essential skills and knowledge; and a school atmosphere of unanxious expectation, trust, and decency. The case study follows the gifted tenth grader through an English class, a Scholastic Aptitude Test preparatory class, a drawing and painting class, and a biology class. Finally, teachers at the school respond to questions which address such topics as: extracurricular activities that appeal to gifted and talented students, advanced placement and tracking, personalized education and the range of abilities, and follow-up of school graduates. (DB)

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The Gifted and Talented at Walbrook High:

A Restructured School in Baltimore, Maryland

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Forward

The following is an excerpt from a case study commissioned by the US Office of Education OERI (Jacob Javits Program for the Education of the Gifted and Talented) during the winter of 1991. The case was written over a one year period (1991-92). Some version of this study will be published in The Gifted Child Quarterly.

In 1991, the Javits Program for the Education of the Gifted and talented initiated a series of case studies (five in all), each of which provided a "snapshot" of representative programs for gifted and talented children in the United States. The point of these studies was not to highlight exemplary programs, but rather to provide some samples of approaches to the education of the gifted and talented, c. 1990. The commissioned case studies included a special summer program for urban minority youth, school-based programs for the gifted and talented in rural (Wisconsin) and suburban (outside Cincinnati) settings, as well as the present study which focuses on Walbrook High School in Baltimore, Maryland.

The case study excerpted here, however, was somewhat of an anomaly compared to the others done. Walbrook High School was chosen by the Department of Education as a representative of the Coalition for Essential Schools (explained in more detail in the following pages)--an education reform movement headed by Ted Sizer.

The Coalition's guiding principles include a commitment to providing a education characterized by "high-status knowledge" for all children. This is generally interpreted as a commitment to heterogeneous grouping and the elimination of all "special" classes; including remedial classes, as well as honors and other classes designed for gifted and talented students. At Walbrook High, this philosophy has resulted in the elimination of Advanced Placement classes and a special program to send the most talented students to take courses at a local college. On the other hand, Walbrook High has undergone serious restructuring, and this has resulted in an educational environment which is dedicated and responsive to all its students.

The portions of the Walbrook case study included here focus on the Coalition Principles, the day-to-day educational experiences of Alika, a very talented tenth grade student at Walbrook, and some teachers' responses to the Coalition Principles at the restructured school.

**"The Gifted and Talented at Walbrook High:
A Restructured School in Baltimore, Maryland"**

Background

Walbrook High School is as much a state of mind, an idea, an ideal, as it is a school building. At Walbrook, an urban school located in Baltimore, Maryland, a serious attempt is being made to restructure education. This effort was inspired by the Walbrook administration and faculty, who had the courage to admit that the old system was dysfunctional for the population it was supposed to serve--urban African-American young people. But the foundation for Walbrook's restructuring was built upon the "Coalition for Essential Schools" Principles, an approach that has become a major catalyst for education reform in the United States.

Walbrook High School's principal and philosophical architect, Sam Billups, describes his conversion to the "Coalition for Essential Schools" in the following way: Billups came to Walbrook in 1980 as the principal. At that time, Walbrook's main claims-to-fame were its band and girls basketball team. The student population was (and is) virtually 100% black, with about 53% of the families receiving some sort of public assistance, although the Walbrook zone also includes families from the middle-class, professional category.

But Walbrook High School also exhibited the classic symptoms of malaise suffered by many urban high schools--high drop-out and truancy rates, low SAT scores, low college admissions, and an educational environment that was uninspired and impoverished. The drugs and crime, anger and hopelessness, so prevalent in the Walbrook neighborhood had infiltrated the school. (Moreover, the Baltimore City Public School system is able to provide $4,614 per pupil, which is just over half of what wealthier counties in Maryland spend.)

Dr. Billups says that his first attempts to improve the academic standards and college admission rates--SAT prep courses--were unsuccessful. Walbrook's problems were systemic, and occasional transfusions of skills and facts failed to make significant improvements in the ailing school environment. He felt that the school needed more dramatic and substantive changes and set about shopping for reform notions that seemed promising.

Thus, in 1983, while attending a National Association of Secondary School Principals conference in Las Vegas, Dr. Billups was drawn to a lecture hall filled to overflowing with people straining to hear Ted Sizer's call for reform and restructuring of American education. Sizer, a former private school head-master, Dean of the School of Education at Harvard University, and at the time a professor at Brown University preached a doctrine that recognized the shortcomings of the public school system--ideas that were first embodied in his education classic, Horace's Compromise (1984). Sizer sought radical solutions for our

schools, which are summarized in the Coalition for Essential Schools Nine Principles:

* **Principle 1:** The school should focus on helping adolescents to learn to use their minds well.
* **Principle 2:** Each student should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge.
* **Principle 3:** The school's goals should apply to all students.
* **Principle 4:** Teaching and learning should be personalized, with teachers and principles "unreservedly" responsible for what is studied, how much time is spent, and what materials and pedagogies are used. No teacher should have a class load of more than eighty students.
* **Principle 5:** The governing metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker, rather than the more familiar metaphor, teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services.
* **Principle 6:** The diploma should be awarded upon successful demonstration of mastery.
* **Principle 7:** The tone of the school should stress unanxious expectation, trust, and decency.
* **Principle 8:** The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first and specialists second.
* **Principle 9:** Ultimate administrative and budget targets should allow for student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer students; time for collective planning; and competitive salaries. The ultimate per-pupil cost should not exceed traditional schools' by more than 10 percent.
  (Prospectus, Coalition for Essential Schools)

Sizer's discussion of these Nine Principles struck a responsive chord in Dr. Sam Billups, since he had independently come to recognize the necessity for many of them. He was ready to sign on. He saw that the philosophy of the Coalition for Essential Schools had the flexibility to allow him to shape reforms that could work for Walbrook High. And he thought that the Principles were sound--especially Principle #3 (The school's goals should apply to all students.) Dr. Billups believes that urban youngsters are too often labeled and tracked in junior high school as "non-academic" types. Decisions made at this level may determine a student's fate in high school and life. Billups, as well as many Walbrook teachers and students, say that many urban youngsters don't really settle down and get serious about school until the eleventh and twelfth grades. Then they may find them-selves in a non-academic track, and so deficient in academic preparation that higher education has become, essentially, out-of-reach. The logical solution, then, is to provide an academic program that will not shut students out of academic options, especially if they have a late awakening at age eighteen or so.

The Coalition for Essential Schools was sufficiently compre-hensive, flexible and ambitious to take these factors into account and offer workable solutions. In 1985, Walbrook High School joined the Coalition, which currently includes about 207 public and private schools in various locations across the United States.

The Walbrook staff spent the first year reading, thinking, and planning; and then initiated the new program based upon the Coalition philosophy to 7% of the student body during the 1986-87 academic year. If the new program proved to be as effective as it was promising, eventually the entire school would be converted.

The Walbrook experiment was well underway, when in 1988 the physical structure that was Walbrook High was found to have dangerous amounts of asbestos. Overnight, the building was closed and students and staff were moved to nearby under-populated Southwestern High, a fortress-like modern high school that is situated high on a hill overlooking Baltimore.

Such a move and incorporation into another school building might have destroyed any other school's sense of identity and mission, but the students and staff of Walbrook seem steadfast in their purpose despite the--year inconvenience of displacement. Their goal is to create an environment where urban youngsters can learn and succeed in their academic endeavors, despite the distractions and obstacles that life sets before inner city youth.

But the configuration of the educational program of Baltimore City Public Schools, like that of many American public schools, has been established on principles that do not always parallel those Principles given above. Baltimore has an 125-year-old tradition of providing specialized magnet schools for high ability students. There are seven such city-wide school high schools in Baltimore--four are designated as college preparatory, one is a polytechnic (pre-engineering), one for the arts, and one vocational. Students in the "city-wide" schools may come from any zone in the city to attend, provided they have met the required academic criteria as eighth graders. The minimum criteria for the "academic" high schools include reading at or above grade level, grades (80% average), as well as teacher recommendations. Since more students apply for the "city-wide schools" than there are slots, the actual criteria can be much higher. Moreover, the "vocational" city-wide high schools are also selective, and attract the better students who are not college-bound. (See Appendix B for profiles of city-wide schools.)

About one third of Baltimore's public high school population attend these city-wide schools, while the zone or neighborhood schools serve the remaining two-thirds. Since by design, the most talented and motivated students (who often have the most involved and concerned parents) attend the city-wide schools, zone schools such as Walbrook High School must provide an education for the rest. (See Appendix C for profiles of zone schools)

What quickly becomes apparent in perusing these profiles, is that, not only do the city-wide schools, especially the academic high schools, receive students who are more academically able-- they also select those who are more motivated (see attendance and drop-out rates); less poor (see Chapter 1 and school lunch statistics); and less likely to have handicapping conditions (see special education statistics).

Walbrook is one of Baltimore's eight "zone" high schools--it is a neighborhood school, with the student population coming from the immediate community (at least this was true before the asbestos was discovered and Walbrook had to move to the Southwestern High School building). There are some academically talented students attending Walbrook who qualified for one or more of the city-wide magnet schools, but who elected to stay in the neighborhood

at Walbrook for various reasons. Some want to attend the same school as their older brothers and sisters, and keep up the family tradition. Some parents have become disciples of the Coalition philosophy and choose this for their children. One very bright student said she rejected the city-wide academic magnet school, an all-girls public school, because she wanted to have classes with boys. Some Walbrook students left the magnet schools because they failed or got into trouble.

Can the Coalition for Essential Schools philosophy, as it has been interpreted at Walbrook, be effective for the gifted and talented students, as well as for the "regular" students, given the fact that the majority of students in Walbrook's zone are academically able and motivated attend the city-wide magnet schools? Specifically:

- -- Is it possible to deliver an excellent education for those who are motivated and who learn quickly and well in a school dedicated to Principle #3--that the goals of the school should apply to all students?
- -- Is Principle #2--that all students master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge--likely to mean in practice that the most able learners are limited only to these essential learnings at a basic level?
- -- Can the teachers deliver a sufficiently personalized education (Principle # 4) that the gifted and talented students at Walbrook are as prepared for higher education as are their peers who attend a magnet school? Do teachers have small enough student loads to allow individualization?
- -- Do the benefits attendant to being a student at Walbrook High, with its unique commitment to educational success for all students, more than counterbalance any deficiencies that may result from the lack of specialized programs for the gifted and talented?

In short, what sort of education is provided to bright, motivated, and highly achieving young African-American students who attend a restructured Coalition inner-city high school ?

Alika: A Day in a Life

The Walbrook school day begins like that of many other schools--with a homeroom at 9:00 AM and the national anthem over the public address system. Mr. J., the homeroom teacher, is a warm and cheerful mathematics teacher who resides over a group of 25 tenth graders. He greets each student affectionately as they wander in for attendance, and they respond in kind. At Walbrook High, terms of affection--"honey", "baby", "darlin'", and the like--are used by teachers to students, and among students.

The morning announcements on the PA system include the predictable recap of the previous day's sports events, and changes in meeting times for various activities, as well as homilies such as "Thank you for going about the day getting an education" and "Profanity is the language of the ignorant". The tone is positive and upbeat.

Alika is one of Mr. J.'s tenth grade students. A nice-looking girl with a medium build and a

short page-boy hair-style, she is nicely, but conservatively, turned out in pastel sweater and jeans. Alika is right on-time for school and has all her papers and textbooks ready for the day. She sits quietly reading a hard-bound copy of a horror-thriller, Demon Night, by Michael Seraczynski which she has taken out of the Enoch Pratt Public Library. The book jacket compares its style to that of a Stephen King novel. Alika is an avid reader who digests about four such novels per week. She has been doing so for years. Stephen King is a current favorite author, as are Robert Heinlien and Ray Bradbury. She has just finished reading Farenheit 451 with which she was very much taken. But she reads almost anything popular, including the likes of Sidney Shelton novels. Generally, her tastes run to mystery and science fiction.

Alika is never seen in school without a novel, which she pulls out and reads during "down-times" in and between her classes. She estimates that she manages to spend about an hour and a half per day doing pleasure-reading at school.

Alika is the fourth child in her family to attend Walbrook. Two sisters and a brother preceded her. All were good students and the Walbrook teachers remember them as quiet and studious. They have similar high expectations for Alika. Alika says of Walbrook: I'm happy that I chose Walbrook. I can't really say why. I don't think that I'd like Western (the "liberal arts", college preparatory magnet school that she had qualified to attend)...The atmosphere that I picked up wasn't me. I like the people and the teachers at Walbrook. Up at Western I couldn't find anything that I was interested in. They gave us a high school planning guide (and I found that) Western went for college prep and law. Walbrook went for mass communications and I said I want to be a journalist, so I don't know if I want to go to Western if they aren't going to talk about it."

When the bell rings, Alika, a Walbrook High "Coalition" student, files out with her classmates, moving through the cavernous Southwestern High building to her first-hour English class. She exchanges greetings with various friends and acquaintances in the halls. These cheerful salutations often take the form of a clenched-fist salute, or an arm out thrust and passed across the front of the chest. The effect is reminiscent of Star Trek, but the greetings are interspersed with smiles, hugs, and calls of "how are you doin', sugardrop?". The students seem relaxed and happy.

Walbrook has arranged its daily schedule of classes to allow Principle #2, "Each student should master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge" to operate. This Principle has been summed up by Coalition for Essential Schools as the "less is more" principle.

> When a school offers too many electives, essential courses can get short-changed or crowded out. When a single course is over-stuffed, material tends to be covered, not learned. ...In short, Sizer says, the more complicated a school's program, the less likely it is that serious intellectual education will take place. (Chion-Kenney, 1987)

For Walbrook, this means that four subjects are emphasized--English, social studies, science, and mathematics. Walbrook also has a two-year foreign language requirement. Each student takes four academic subjects, taught alternately two each day for one hundred minutes. This allows the classroom teacher time to undertake larger projects and finish them without interruption. There is less "down-time" for passing, attendance and getting organized. The schoolwork becomes more task-oriented than time-oriented (Aronoff, W. & Toloudis, M.; 1987). In addition to the two long time blocks in each Walbrook school day, the schedule also provides two fifty minute time blocks for classes that meet five days per week in the traditional fashion.

Mr. D. presides over Alika's first and second hour tenth grade English class. He is blue-jeaned, bearded, a little shaggy, and thirtysomething. A white man, he refers to individual students as "cousin", and has a bantering, joking manner that the students love. His humor operates on several levels, and while not all students get all of his jokes, nonetheless, everyone seems to be enjoying themselves. The multi-level approach is characteristic of his teaching as well. This is one way that he is able to reach all of his students without losing the slower ones, or boring people like Alika. He is her favorite teacher (and, it is later learned, he was selected as Baltimore Public Schools' "Teacher of the Year" for 1990).

Mr. D. asks a visitor to introduce herself and to say why she's there, in order to assure the class that she is not "an executioner from Central Office." The group is accustomed to having visitors who come to learn about Walbrook as a Coalition school, and seem proud of the attention their school is getting. Mr. D. then asks each member of the class to introduce him- or herself and to say a word of welcome. One youngster becomes completely tongue-tied in his welcome, but finally manages a few words. Later, Mr. D. says that this young man has come a long way and that earlier in the year was so inarticulate and nervous that he was unable to look anyone in the eye or to speak at all. Mr. D. points out that many youngsters enter the school in "strangely deficit" conditions, seemingly having learned little in previous schools or at home. It is Mr. D.'s goal to move each student forward, rather that focusing on what hasn't come before.
Mr. D. starts the class by going over the day's work which has been written on the front board:

<u>A Day's Work</u>

I. Complete a "skillbuilder" (an exercise from Warriner's grammar book). An outline or a Task #7 exercise would be respected and admired (25 points).
II. Seek employment individually or in groups (25 points).
III. "Writing about Your Life is Proof that You Have One", Task #5 (25 points).

While these directions may seem incomprehensible to the uninitiated, the students understand them with no difficulty. Mr. D. was one of the principle architects of the Coalition-based restructuring of Walbrook, and has taken its Principles to heart. Principle #5 is "the governing metaphor of school should be student-as-worker rather than teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services." For Mr. D. this means that the traditional teacher-in-front-of-the-classroom lecture is not an approach to be used. Rather, students are assigned tasks and

expected to complete them, using the ample resources made available to them. This classroom has a warm, lived-in atmosphere, filled with books and reference materials, as well as student work.

During this 100 minute class, students will work through the three assignments given above. Plenty of choices are given to students in this structure. Students select their own assignments from the list of possibilities and work individually. The atmosphere is informal. Students may talk, eat, and move around the room.

Five students come in late, sit down and begin working. At Walbrook, students constantly come into class late, often as much as thirty minutes or more. Most late comers seem not to have any kind of formal passes, but they often have reasons. Flexibility is valued by most of the teaching staff and must be tolerated by the rest. A student may miss part or all of a class if she is working with another teacher, on a field trip, or doing "something". Teachers accept this as concomitant with Principle #7, "The tone of the school should stress unanxious expectation, trust, decency." Thus, latecomers and skippers seem not to be "grilled" as they are in most schools.

Alika begins work promptly on her chosen assignment from "the Bible", the Warriner's grammar book. Another student, Patricia, comes over and asks her about the results of an interscholastic academic competition--Mock Trials--held the previous day. Alika is involved preparing for the next Mock Trial after school, before school, and during her lunch hours. She informs Patricia that the Walbrook team lost to an all-boys private school by a narrow margin of only seven points, but that she thought that they had "kicked butt" and should have won. Patricia chatters about her ROTC drill team episode and about a speech to be given on Friday. Alika listens and responds, all the time working diligently on her assignment in Warriner's. Alika is a girl who can do two things at once.

The two girls a study in contrast. Although both are obviously very bright and highly involved on school (both are on the student council), Patricia manages to accomplish nearly nothing but fidgety distraction during the 100 minute period, while Alika moves implacably through the day's assignments. James comes over to interrupt the "intellectual discussion" and asks for assistance from Alika. It appears she often helps other students and is clearly their acknowledged leader in academics.

Alika, although hard at work, misunderstands the directions in the Warriner's grammar "skillbuilder", (which do seem obscure), but understands the grammatical principle of the exercise perfectly. Mr. D. notices her mistake, but does not intercede, even though she will have to do the exercise over again later. He says she will most certainly remember the lesson now. She is allowed to be the "student-as-worker", to make mistakes, and to learn from them.

Two more students roll in late. By this time, Alika has finished the day's assignment and has pulled out her novel, Demon Night. The noise-level rises, and only ten of the 24

students who appear to be on-task at this time. Mr. D. responds by threatening to "stage a vicious attack on the pockets of idleness".

Mr. D. seems to have taken the coalition "student-as-worker" Principle to heart and run with it, creating a "Classroom Economy" which governs his class and serves equally as a syllabus and menu. Some excerpts from his three-page document (which students have dutifully filed in their notebooks and refer to regularly) are:

> Philosophy:
> The classroom economy is not an economy where every student will be successful for it is very much like the American Economy. Some people have so much money that they never have financial worry and others have to struggle to put a roof over their heads and keep food in their stomachs. Some people work steady (sic) and secure jobs with big corporations while other people work as consultants on projects and fill roles on a contract basis. People often go into business for themselves, becoming entrepreneurs. Naturally, they have saved up some money so that they can afford to take a risk, and it takes some money to set up a small business. There is a great sum of money out there in the Economy, and every person is held responsible for their own economic successes or failures. Someone can choose not to participate in the Economy, to participate only half-heartedly, or to spend one's time doing little else. There are nice things available for a price. Everyone seems to know what the nice things are and how much they cost, but only a few can ever afford to buy them. There are some very fine sets of commendations and public recognition and English grades available. But, they sure are expensive. At the end of the quarter, you will count your money and buy a grade that you can afford.

Mr. D.'s Economy goes on to list the tasks and what students will be paid when they complete one. The Rewards include:

completing one of the Ten Tasks	1000
reading a book	200
arranging a parent conference	50
making a public presentation	50
getting a library card	30

and so on, at some length for pages.

The Ten Tasks mentioned above are big projects that run for weeks during the year, such as purchasing a thirty-week subscription to Newsweek and completing weekly assignments based on its contents, or participating in a debate. Debits may be incurred by suspension from school (-1000), class-cutting (-30), or lewd language (-25). It sounds complicate, but seems to be just the kind of "complicated" that adolescents love--a sort of economic "Dungeons and Dragons" for English class based upon Coalition Principles, and no doubt, years of Mr. D.'s teaching experience.

Today, one of the assignments is to examine the "Help Wanted" section of the Baltimore Sun, and try to discover the available jobs and their concomitant required skills and qualifications. Mr. D. is after more than simply teaching English, longs to spare his students some of the difficulties that he encountered as a younger man when he found himself "driving a truck" for a living. He clearly structures his classes to help prepare these students for the Real World, and wants his students to understand how education can lead to success.

With about 30 minutes left in the period, Mr. D. asks the group for attention and passes out a short article from the Baltimore Sun on journal writing. The class grows completely silent and reads. The students have learned a process to guide their reading known as SQ3R. Each must produce three short questions about the article, list unfamiliar vocabulary words, and produce notes in an outline form. This seems to be challenging work for most students, including Alika, who goes to the dictionary and looks up "ephemeral" and "squalor".

Mr. D. has written four questions for discussion about the article on the board:

1. What is despair?
2. What benefit have people seen in keeping journals? Explain.
3. What advantages are there, if any, in sharing journals in a workshop setting?
4. What problem does the author identify in "ghetto youngsters"? Is he correct? Is he describing Walbrook ninth and tenth graders?

Like many good teachers, Mr. D. is able to structure the lesson to include a reading comprehension exercise, an introduction to journal writing, and a class discussion that requires analysis. Almost everything that happens in this class has sufficient flexibility and breadth to allow all students to be appropriately challenged. No doubt he could be even more effective in guiding his students and keeping them on task if the class size was smaller--a group of 18 would be nice, rather than the current 25 or more.

During the discussion, James compares journal-keeping to keeping a diary and asks if "this isn't sort of female-ish, pardon me." James' question is treated seriously and respectfully. Mr. D. alludes to "Politically Correct Behavior" as a way to keep people from discussing an issue, and says that James' questions may be answered in the next two days as they discuss journal-writing further. He will ask James about his thoughts on this as the unit progresses.

Except for a few minutes, Alika has been busy and productive in this class. The assigned work is sufficiently broad to keep her busy, and for the most part, appropriately challenged. Indeed, in this class, students who tend to have difficulties in school may be of most concern, since it is a fairly fast-paced and demanding class. But the slower ones can always work on "jobs" outside of class and earn sufficient points to get a good grade. No one need fail.

At 11:00 a.m., students are dismissed and move to the second 100 minute class in the Walbrook, which is called "SAT Prep". This is a "mandatory elective", one of the two electives that all students have. The other is a "real elective".

SAT Prep is held in a large bright room filled with IBM personal computers. Each student is intended to have his or her own computer to use, but unfortunately several "won't come up". The teacher, Mr. C. gets as many students as possible started on computer exercises designed to build mathematical and verbal skills. Students who have functioning computers go to work readily. Most students work on drill-and-practice programs that are at the elementary or middle school levels. Mr. C. discourages them from playing games that are also included in network options, but lets them choose their PC exercises without intervening.

Mr. C. says that it is difficult to know the effect that this class is having on student achievement. Students seem to like the computers and the graphics that are generated when they answer a question correctly. No students are doing any programming, however, nor are there any who seem sufficiently in command of the machines to help Mr. C. with the computers that won't come up. If there is a problem, they wait for Mr. C. to come over and take care of it. If ever there was a class where a teacher could use teaching assistants, this is it. The classroom itself is enormous, making it difficult for Mr. C. to get to everyone, and the one functioning printer is off in a yet-more-distant cranny. On top of the 25 students in the class and a visitor, there are staff members and students from other classes using the PCs as word processors. They also need help, occasionally. Mr. C. moves diligently from problem to problem, but many must wait since he is only one person.

Students in the SAT Prep class do not work on the computers everyday, but meet in a regular classroom to do work on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and literature with Mr. C. This class was to include mathematics instruction as well, but the current schedule doesn't provide a mathematics teacher. The students' notebooks are filled with vocabulary words and reading tests. Mr. C. is an English teacher, drafted into his current job of soft- and hardware technician. He comments, "Alika is in a SAT Prep course that had not really been pre-designed. We don't have the workbooks we should have. The program uses what is in the computer lab. Alika is working on her own. I don't give her much direction at all. She takes the ball and goes with it."

Alika and Patricia, working together, load an SAT preparation program, a program designed for high school juniors and seniors. They are unsure which sections they have worked on before and which are new to them. They choose a reading comprehension lesson, and the computer spins off a several paragraphs summarizing Henry James' rather opaque views on Art. After reading the text, the girls begin answering the multiple choice reading comprehension questions. The questions are hard, and they must scroll back in the text in order to answer them. After trying a couple and guessing wildly, the girls decide that they need to read the passage more thoroughly.

They begin the program over again, and the next time through score five out of five on the comprehension questions. Slapping palms joyfully, they call Mr. C. over to ask him what to do next. He replies to Alika, "You are on your own. I don't have to worry about you." (Later, he confides that Alika is probably the best-read person in the building.)

Next, the girls select a verbal analogies portion of the SAT program. The vocabulary and reasoning required in this section are extremely challenging. Working together, Alika and Patricia get only one of ten answers correct. They dutifully copy down from the computer screen the right answers in their notebooks, but the program doesn't provide definitions for the incorrect vocabulary selections. Alika seems unlikely to frequently encounter this sort of vocabulary among her friends, in school, or in her current pleasure reading. Words like "catharsis", encountered outside the context of classical tragedy and presented on a computer screen as mere vocabulary may not be remembered. And perhaps Henry James on Art is really worthy of more thoughtful analysis than is required by a computerized reading comprehension exercise.

Alika does not seem to be getting a systematic exposure to either traditional great literature, or the recognized fine writing used in literature courses focusing on a multi-cultural diversity of authors. Alika reads constantly, but without much guidance or the opportunity to discuss and interpret what she reads with others. But many of Alika's classmates are not reading at that level, so more challenging literature is seldom assigned. Rather, eleventh graders at Walbrook saw the film, The Red Badge of Courage, but did not read the book, and Hamlet was treated in the same way.

After class, Alika goes to lunch. The cafeteria here is like high school cafeterias everywhere--large, noisy with huge masses of students who must wait in long lines for the predictable food. Ubiquitous administrators keep eagle eyes on the proceedings. Alika meets her girlfriends for lunch. They are all bright and serious about school. Crystal, the only white student at Walbrook, is included in the group. As far as boys go, Alika is not yet dating, but socializes with mixed groups of boys and girls.

Suddenly, there is some scuffling and a fight between two girls briefly breaks out and is stopped by administrators and students. It is all taken rather seriously, and the girls are given lots of attention, then sent to separate places. The students report that girls probably get into fights more often than boys at Walbrook. A friend of Alika's observes the proceedings a bit disdainful, and says that she's in school to learn, not fight.
Alika quickly eats and leaves the lunchroom (no one guards the door prohibiting this) and returns to Mr. D.'s classroom where students are preparing for the Mock Trial competition, an extra-curricular activity that nonetheless earns Alika points for English. No need to pay her here, though--she is totally involved in this activity. Three twelfth grade boys and three tenth grade girls have been selected by Mr. D. to compete. They prepare the case from a transcript of a real court case involving the "right-to-die" issue. The gist of the case is that a woman, an automobile accident victim, is in a persistent vegetative state and her family is divided on whether the life sustaining tubes should be removed.

Teams of Maryland high school students participate in the Mock Trial competitions, preparing their cases and competing in courtrooms where a real judge hears their arguments and awards them points. Each case allows the team to alternate between defense and prosecution.

On his lunch hour, Mr. D. listens to the students' opening and closing arguments, and prepares them to grill the witnesses. He clearly loves the rhetoric, strategy, and drama involved and must be a frustrated lawyer. Like a basketball team preparing for the big game, these students are completely focused on the Mock Trials. Mr. D. tears at his sandwich ferociously, as the students challenge each other in preparation for the second trial to take place in two days. Alika and these other bright students gravitate to his classroom each day for lunch. This is typical of gifted and talented students who seem to crave more intellectually sophisticated interactions than the high school environment often provides.

After lunch, Alika reports to art class, "Drawing and Painting" which is her elective. The course helps fulfill the one credit fine arts graduation requirement. This class meets daily, during the shorter 50 minute time block. The class is working on a "monochrome" painting project. Students are painting still lives in tempura. Alika has brought in an old pump loafer of her father's to paint. Alika's father is an engineer, but her father and mother are divorced, and she sees very little of him.

About half of the students in the art class go right to work, without any prompting from Mr. H., the teacher. Apparently, if students finish a project early, they may ask for more work, or do nothing. Half have chosen the second option, and sit idly for the period. Throughout the class, Mr. H. is seated at one of the student tables, working congenially on the school yearbook with five girls. There is much kibitzing and bantering over which pictures should appear.

Among Alika's classmates, there are two students who seldom seem to be in class and do little work when they are there. One, acute and coquette-ish little girl wears a red Nike stocking cap perched jauntily on her head. She spends most of her class time draping herself over the available males, or thinking up excuses to roam the halls. Since she causes no trouble aside from the distraction of the nearest boy, no teacher asks her to work.

Another student, Patricia (who was encountered in Alika's other classes), is an obviously intelligent and strong-willed girl, who is completely immersed in the social life of Walbrook. She is a leader who holds many class offices. Because of the freedom at Walbrook, the school does an excellent job in providing opportunities for her to develop her considerable leadership abilities. But she is constantly out of class, organizing this and that. When in class, she seems to hardly ever attend to the academic work at hand. Because she is so bright, she is still far ahead of the rest of the group and gets good grades.

Back in the art class, Alika works a bit on shoe painting, chatting with the group at her table. When finished with her self-appointed task for the day, the Demon Night reappears, which she reads until it is time to pass to the last class of the day.

At 2:30 PM, Alika enters the classroom of Mrs. W., one of her favorite teachers, for Biology II. Ms. W. is a former health teacher who has been reassigned to the science department when Walbrook did away with the "health requirement", according to the

Coalition Principle that "less is more". The biology classroom is a cavernous, windowless room with extremely high ceilings. Except for a lonely cutting from a philodendron in an unlit plant growing apparatus, the classroom is utterly barren of student work or signs that it is a science room. It looks as if it might have been designed as a band room, but the acoustics are so bad that this seems unlikely. It is difficult to hear the teacher because of an echoing effect, and the noise of normal adolescent activity seems deafening. Ms. W. has suffered much from the move to Southwestern High, having been assigned to a non-science classroom where "they haven't given me so much as a beaker".

The class begins at once as students are asked to copy, word-for-word, a paragraph on digestion from an overhead projector, as well as 18 related new vocabulary words. Alika sits close to the screen, writing diligently. Mrs. W. points out that students will need to know this vocabulary in order to dissect fetal pigs. Mrs. W. reads the definitions of the terms, but there is no lecture, discussion, or attempt to relate the terms conceptually. The homework assignment is to look up another 18 words in the dictionary or the biology texts. There are two good standard high school texts available in the classroom.

Ten minutes later, three boys and the girl in the Nike cap arrive; Patricia comes in a few minutes later still wearing her leather flag harness from her ROTC class. As in many urban high schools, ROTC classes are important since the military represents an clear opportunity for education and a life away from the inner city.

Alika works diligently on the biology vocabulary assignment. Students are not provided with biology textbooks to take home and must consequently use dictionaries at home to complete the assignment. Alika is probably the most efficient, task-oriented, and motivated student in the group. Consequently, she has most of her homework done before it is time to leave. She copies the definitions neatly in small tight handwriting.

Ms. W. generally receives homework from 40-45% of her students, but says that all of them eventually get in the long-term projects. Because of the teaming of teachers that is possible and encouraged at Walbrook, the next long-term assignment, a term paper, will be done in conjunction with the English teacher.

A head count reveals that there are 17 girls and 6 boys in this class. There generally seems to be more girls than boys at Walbrook, and the number of males seems to dwindle as the day progresses. Moreover, in this group, it is soon apparent that girls dominate in academic achievement. More boys are dropping out of school than girls.

But Mr. D. says later that he believes that a school culture which appreciates academic accomplishment is developing--"The Honor Roll Kids are OK"--and Alika doesn't catch the resentment for being studious and smart that she did at junior high. Academic achievement for boys seems to retain a more onerous cache. Mr. D. points out that at Walbrook, students are not coddled. Students with serious academic deficiencies must either catch up or drop out, but the school provides a strong personal appeal for the student to deal with

academic skills--in a remedial fashion if need be. For most students, the realization that school must be taken seriously if one is to increase one's options in life doesn't occur until after the 9th and 10th grades, everyone from Dr. Billups, the principal, to the students themselves agree. Still, many do drop out, and simple head counts show that more girls than boys are attending Walbrook.

The result is that the tenth graders and older students at Walbrook are those who want to be successful and who come to school regularly. This, in part, accounts for the generally studious and pleasant atmosphere. Moreover, Alika and her friends say that the school is relatively free of the drugs, serious violence, and shake-downs that plague many inner city schools. Walbrook is a haven--a place to work and learn, and where most of the teachers seem to genuinely care.

The school day is about to end, and students return to their homerooms to pick up their progress reports. Alika isn't happy with her progress report because she has received a mere "satisfactory" in two of her classes, rather than the highest evaluation which is "good".

As the vast majority of students file into to the busses to be transported back to the Walbrook neighborhood and their homes, Alika and her friends gear up for the part of the school day they seem to most enjoy--working on the Mock Trial preparations with Mr. D. (Many other Walbrook students stay after school for athletics, as well). Being temporarily housed at the Southwestern High School building which is two or three miles from the Walbrook neighborhood forces many students to forego extra-curricular activities, since it is difficult to get home by public transportation after the school busses leave. Few of these students have their own cars or even family cars.

Moreover, the Coalition coordinator, Mrs. F. points out, far fewer parents visit the school since it has moved out of the neighborhood. She and the rest of the staff eagerly look forward to the 1991-92 school year when the asbestos-free, newly remodeled Walbrook building will reopen. The commitment to the Coalition for Essential Schools philosophy by staff, students, and the community, has probably saved Walbrook High as an entity.
In Mr. D.'s classroom after school, Alika and her two girlfriends begin unbidden to straighten desks and sweep the floor. Mr. D. is nowhere to be seen--probably off on bus duty or taking care of some administrative task. When asked why they are cleaning the room, one student responds, "He helps us out. We help him out."

Two senior boys join the group to watch and critique a video of the team's performance at the last Mock Trial. There are three tenth grade girls on the team, and three twelfth grade boys. No eleventh graders tried out, which, Mr. D. explains, was probably because he had none in his regular classes. The video shows that in the last trial, Alika played a witness, Mrs. Hartlove, with poise and conviction. While watching her performance and hooting from time to time, Alika finishes her biology homework, then switches to her omni-present novel.

Around 5:30 p.m., Jerome, one of the seniors who participates in the Mock Trial competition, joins the group. He is a handsome and stylish young man, obviously intelligent, with a quietly thoughtful manner. In the Mock Trial video, Jerome was the most articulate and at ease of all the participants from both schools. He moved about the courtroom with the ease of a television attorney, causing the judge to commend him, tongue-in-cheek, on his erudite as well as highly mobile summary.

Jerome wants to be a lawyer. But although this is March of his senior year, he has not yet taken SATs. He plans to take them in the next few months, and to go to the University of Maryland, Baltimore Campus (UMBC). He didn't take the tests sooner because he had intended to go into the Marine Corps--he wouldn't need SATs for that--but the Persian Gulf War changed his mind. He seems unaware of the fact that if he had taken them earlier and done reasonably well, colleges and universities from all over the United States might have sought him out, and his education options could increase many times over. He certainly makes a good impression and would do well in any college interview.

But Walbrook students with high academic potential are often singled out by the staff and given opportunities to see beyond their immediate environment. Mrs. F., the Coalition Coordinator, regularly arranges for students to attend special events that nurture a more expansive outlook. Walbrook teachers chauffeur students to such events, since many students do not have family cars. Mrs. F. says the she and other teachers at Walbrook try to know each child as an individual, and point them toward activities that will help them to expand their opportunities.

Around 6:30 PM, a lawyer friend of Mr. D.'s comes in to coach the group. The session goes on until about 8:00 PM, when Mr. D. sees the girls in the group safely home.

The following morning in school, a sleepy-looking Alika and her tenth grade classmates report to the cafeteria for a group meeting with the guidance counselor to construct schedules for eleventh grade. This isn't complicated since choices are few--ability grouped classes and electives have been eliminated. Alika couldn't take French I in tenth grade because there were not enough French teachers at Walbrook. Nonetheless, she signs up for French II, and says that she will somehow catch up. This doesn't seem to bother her.

Following the group scheduling, students fill out a "school climate questionnaire" designed by a different school system. The guidance counselor says that it will help the staff to restructure the school to make it better, "since some of you are not coming to school all of the time". The guidance staff values the opinions of the students, and the students take the questionnaire seriously.

These important decisions having been made without much immediate opportunity for parental input, Alika goes on to geometry class, the subject that she finds most difficult. Students sit at tables in congenial groups. The teacher, Mr. B., has the board covered with neatly drawn geometry problems, which incorporate a good deal of Algebra I. The class is

conducted in an unusual manner. Mr. B. directs students' attention to a problem on the board, and they compete to solve it. The first person with the correct answer gets an extra 50 points. Then, through a series of questions Mr. B. directs at individuals, the problem is explained. While nearly every student is involved and serious about the mathematics, the lesson is punctuated by wild hand-waving and laughter.

The ability levels in this class vary greatly, but by conducting the class in this manner most students seem to follow along and can answer some of the questions. For instance, a problem involving similar triangles with some of the sides given in algebraic formulations is complicated, but a subquestion in the solution might be as simple as "Is 3/4 = 6/8?" The fact that this question elicits some debate and blank looks gives an idea of what Mr. B. must deal with in terms of the varied backgrounds of the students.

Some of the problems are solved algorithmically, such as "How many diagonals can be drawn in a decagon?". Although no formal proofs are taught, most of the problems are interesting and challenging. Mr. B. points out somewhat apologetically that the State of Maryland's new guidelines for geometry de-emphasize proofs, and consequently, much of the class focuses on formulas and mathematics.

Alika has difficulty with the more complicated problems--this is the only class that challenges her in this way. But she earns extra points by working ahead of Mr. B. on problems on the board, carefully copying down everything to review for a test.

Mr. B.'s methods and the course are true to Coalition Principle #3, that the school's goals apply to all students--and consequently all students graduate from Walbrook with four years of the mathematics associated with a "college-bound" curriculum. In a more typical school setting, many of these students would be sentenced to "basic mathematics" classes to languish forever in endless arithmetic problems. Here, they are given the opportunity to learn some geometry and move along in mathematics--without stigma--as well as the very real opportunity to catch up if they are willing and able.

Following the mathematics class, Alika rushes through the cavernous halls at break-neck speed in order not to be late for Mrs. M.'s American History class. Mrs. M. gives extra points for being on time for class. Mrs. M. seems slightly embarrassed about this since the Coalition philosophy stresses flexibility, but this is one class that starts on time with a full complement of students. The desks have been pushed together to make student groups of four. While many of the students here are in Alika's classes--tenth graders--there are other students who look much older.

The class is studying slavery in Colonial America. Every bit of chalkboard space is covered with questions given in outline form, so one can see the development of the issues. Mrs. M. begins with some review, asking questions and calling on students by name to answer. Alika knows all of the answers and it is clear that this material has been well covered. Next, Mrs. M. assigns a number of the questions on the board as today's lesson:

1. What was invented that caused slavery to grow?
2. Look at the graphs on p. 188 and write a summarizing statement about the growth of slavery (the graphs contained information about the price of cotton, the amount of cotton produced, and the increase in the slave population over time).
3. How did the slaves sabotage their masters?
4. Complete a chart summarizing the results of the slave revolts by Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Wesey, and Nat Turner.

Students are to answer by reading from the two texts that are provided. One is a standard American History text which is written at approximately the ninth grade level, and the other book is Promise of America: Breaking and Building which seems directed at minority concerns and social problems in America. It is written at the about the seventh or eighth grade level, but deals with interesting issues. The students are asked to work cooperatively in groups to discuss and record the answers to the questions.

Alika's group seems to have the brightest students--or at least the most motivated--and goes quickly to work, finding each answer in one of the textbooks and writing it down. When referring to the slaves of colonial America, these students use the pronoun, "we". But despite their personalization of this aspect of American history, their answers are often superficial at best. There is very little discussion since the main goal seems to be to finish the assignment quickly, getting each answer exactly correct, although the teacher intended to for them to deal with the questions in depth. Other groups seem no more thoughtful, but work on the material in a more desultory manner.

Alika's group is the first to finish. Using the extra time available, she quizzes her friends on the names and achievements of famous African-Americans, something that they will be tested on later in the week. Then, she gives James her history notes on this material to copy, and studies for an upcoming biology quiz. This enonomy of time--using every spare moment in school--enables her to watch television or do pleasure reading in the evenings because she gets most of her homework done in school.

When the most groups have completed the work, Mrs. M. leads a class discussion on the assigned questions. A young man at the table in front of her sleeps soundly through the entire class, undisturbed. Mrs. M. elaborates each student's response with thoughtful and insightful comment, but the students seem uninterested and grow restless. When Alika is called upon, she provides an answer taken word for word from the text, precisely correct, but with no additional thoughts of her own. Mrs. M. pauses, and then responds "Good". What more can she say? Alika is clearly capable of so much more, but does the work exactly as she is told--no more, no less.

Although Alika's group finished the assignment with time to spare, about half of the students in this class didn't have time complete it. Some are barely able read the words in the text, and it's not clear that the comprehension is there.

Mrs. M. assigns the next eight questions from the board for homework. The class grows quiet again, as they diligently copy the questions. These questions focus on slave auctions, the lives of slaves, and the laws covering slave ownership. By the time she must leave for lunch, Alika has completed six of the eight assigned questions.

The art class which follows lunch proceeds much as it had the previous day. Alika quickly puts the finishing touches on her tempura painting project. Although her effort is minimal, Alika does more work than about half the students in the class. One girl sits and stares, another reads a Newsweek. Mr. H. sits at a student table and works with those who approach him for help or advice, but makes no attempt to circulate, direct activities, or urge students to work. Alika takes her work, now dry, over to him. He considers it, discusses it with her a bit, and gives her an 80% on the project. Alika returns to her table and begins to study aloud for her biology quiz. She is highly motivated and not afraid to show it. Earlier in the day, one boy called her an overachiever, but it was done affectionately--her identity at Walbrook is that of a good student.

Mrs. W.'s Biology II class begins with a quiz that tests the memorization of biology vocabulary and anatomy--"Define endoskeleton, exoskeleton, myosin, axial skeleton, and appendicular skeleton". This is followed by a page of notes to be copied verbatim from the overhead. When asked who has completed the homework--18 vocabulary definitions--and only three students raise their hands. Of course, Alika is one.

Since few have done the homework, Ms. W. assigns each student one of the vocabulary words to look up in the dictionary in class. They then are to write the definition on the blackboard, or on a strip of colored paper with a marker, to stick on the wall. The students seem to get childishly excited about this. For Alika, this is all down-time,since she completed this homework the previous day.

As the bell rings for dismissal, Mrs. W. announces that all of the students will be given more time the next day to copy the definitions from the board. But Alika will be spared the third day of this assignment, since she will be absent in order to participate in the Mock Trial competition.

Watching them as a group, the students seem most industrious when copying from the board. They seem to grow restive during activities requiring reasoning and discussion. It is somewhat disconcerting, but not surprising, that Alika has bought into this pattern. She is intelligent and thoughtful, and capable of much more. Teachers must struggle at Walbrook to get students to really think, as is the case with adolescents at any school anywhere. But here more than most schools, there is a good deal of variation in skill and motivational levels in each class, since no ability grouping is allowed, as per Principle #3. Some students have serious deficits, and consequently it is difficult for teachers to plan student work that is sufficiently varied to simultaneously challenge, and yet not defeat, each student. Clearly, some teachers have made more progress in this regard than others, and the solutions vary with the content to be taught and the personalties of the teachers.

A second dilemma for Walbrook teachers is to decide how much freedom to allow in terms of how students use their time--to work or not work. Each teacher has a different tolerance for "down-time" or "time off-task". The question is delicate. When does "facilitating learning" and allowing students the freedom to choose to learn become mere accommodation to students' lethargy or whims? Given the varied motivational levels of students, Walbrook teachers are struggling admirably for solutions.

After school, Alika returns to Mr. D.'s classroom to join her friends in preparing for the Mock Trial.

The following day, Walbrook competes against a Baltimore City magnet school for the academically talented. Although they perform well, they are narrowly defeated. The Walbrook team takes the defeat hard, personally. They are competitors and have worked hard. Only a win will satisfy them.

WALBROOK HIGH RETURNS TO WALBROOK HIGH

In September of 1991, the newly remodeled, asbestos-free Walbrook High School re-opens. The restored Walbrook has sculpture-filled courtyards; spacious, well lit classrooms with floor-to-ceiling "green boards"; a fully functioning health clinic; and lavatories with all of the fixtures intact. The school was obviously built in a time when school budgets were generous, and now, newly renovated, the building looks extremely attractive.

Pre-opening the Walbrook building is much like opening any new school. Mrs. F., the Coalition Coordinator, points out that since all of the Walbrook's 1300 students are new to this building (about 1000 of them are ninth and tenth graders) none of these students know the "real Walbrook". The traditions that went beyond the academic program--clubs, community events, pep rallies and so on--have been lost. This all must be rebuilt, as well. Mrs. F. estimates that it will take about as many years to recover from the move to Southwestern High School building as they were there.

But the principal, Sam Billups, has planned long and well, and has arranged for the re-opening of the building to coincide with the adoption of the Coalition for Essential Schools Principles for the entire student body and school program. Before this, the Coalition had operated as a "school-within-a-school" program.

The Walbrook staff has its work cut out for it. They must reconstruct the extra-curricular programs that disintegrated during the move to Southwestern, as well as the co-curricular ones that provided academic enrichment or remediation. These programs occur before school, after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer. There are two computer labs in the new Walbrook, but no teachers to staff them. (Walbrook is understaffed because many more students registered there in the fall than had been anticipated and there are not enough teachers for them.) The old Walbrook library suffered greatly from the remodeling and it will take years to rebuild the collection.

Dr. Billups says he is searching for a good librarian since the communications arts program is built around the library, which should be the heart of the school. Also completely missing is the mass communications studio, which had been disassembled and carted away.

Walbrook teachers formerly not involved with the Coalition, and Walbrook's many teachers and administrators new to the school, must be provided with intensive inservice training in order to learn about "school re-structuring" and the Coalition philosophy. Coalition veterans, Mr. D., Ms. W., Mr. J. and Mr. B., all are leaders of new teams. A team includes an English, social studies, science, mathematics, and special education teacher. Each team is responsible planning two thirds of its students' educational program (time), while the remaining third consists of electives. Program planning ideally includes integration of the subject matter and work on common themes. For example, Mr. J.'s new team has chosen the issue of "homelessness" to explore. In order to do this extensive planning, teachers from each team have a 58 minute common planning period; which, if connected to a lunch period; stretches to 88 minutes.

Dr. Billups finds that the biggest current problem is helping the teachers new to the Coalition learn to use the 100 minute time blocks well--"they just don't know what to do with all that time". To assist with this and other issues and adjustments concomitant to school-based management and restructuring, Billups has also instituted a "Center for Change", which focuses on staff development, within the school day.

Alika is happy to be in the remodeled building which is close to her home. She can come early or stay late at school without having to worry about transportation. Now an eleventh grader, she seems even more mature, wears make-up and more feminine clothing. Apparently, there is now a young man in the picture, and her social life is blooming.

Alika is happy at Walbrook. It is a place where she can be comfortable for being herself--a bright and ambitious young lady. "If you're smart and intellectual, the teachers (at Walbrook) go for it. You will find other people in the school who are just like you, but they might not like to show it. At times, it can be really good (to be known as a good student) and at times it can be a pain. In ninth grade and tenth grade I had a thing to prove to people. I had to set my way. I said, this is me. This is my way. This is my reputation. If you all have something against it, that is your problem. Now that I'm an eleventh grader, my reputation is already set, and I'm going to try to play it down a little bit so I can hang out with my regular friends and some other different kind of people. I sort of like my reputation and I sort of dislike it. The good part is being smart and being able to take charge in a group. The bad part is when those people who I really don't like say "nerd" or "teachers pet". But all and all, I like my reputation."

Alika's appearance reminds one of Professor Anita Hill (of the Thomas/Hill Hearings), and she has the same self-contained presence and dignity. Of course, she is participating in the Mock Trial Competition again this year. She plays the part of a woman who filed a lawsuit against her company for not handling her sexual harassment case properly. "It's really fun.

I like it...they keep catching these cases right before they become something controversial and in the news." Alika is also active in junior class activities, as well as the National Honor Society, which has a leadership role in the school.

As an eleventh grader, Alika is taking French I; computer programming (an elective); Biology III, genetics and current issues (instead of chemistry which Ms. W. had urged her to take); Algebra II; world history;and English III-- "It's cool. I like it. We're dealing with Socrates and Sophocles and are reading Oedipus Rex."

She is also planning seriously for college, and is awaiting the results of her PSAT, which will help to determine her chances for a college scholarship and predict the results of the SAT she will take later. She thinks that the verbal section of the PSAT went well, but is worried the mathematics section.

> Since I became a junior, they are stuffing a whole bunch of things about college in our faces, and it's pretty cool...and I'm starting to learn a few things about colleges and financial aid and going from a community college to a regular college. I might have to go the two-year community college route because of my financial situation. I want to start (working) this year to pay my way through college.

Although she still wants to be a journalist or a radio-disc-jockey, Alika is becoming interested in international affairs, as reflected by the change in the authors for her omnipresent novels: She has switched from the horror genre to Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum novels.

THE TEACHERS SPEAK

In the winter of the 1991-92 academic year, half-way through the first year that Walbrook High staff instituted the Coalition Principles for the entire student body, Walbrook teachers who had been observed in the course of this study were invited to respond to the recorded observations and voice their views on the issue at hand: How do gifted and talented students fair at Walbrook High, operating within the framework of the Coalition for Essential Schools? Mr. J. and Mr. B., mathematics teachers; Mr. G., the French teacher; Ms. W., the biology teacher; and Mr. D. and Mr. C., English teachers participated in the following discussion.

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On Extra-Curricular Activities that Appeal to Gifted and Talented Students

Question: At Walbrook, what is there that exists for students who are more talented, more motivated, who have exceptional abilities? Are there things in the school program? How do you deal with these kids?

Mr. C. "It's Academic" is one program, but the students deal with it on there own time.

Ms. W. There are a lot of extracurricular competitions that Walbrook students are involved with. The more motivated and talented students are invited to participate. It's one of the little perks.

Mr. D. We have contests that are available city-wide and statewide. Oftentimes people like Alika are pushed into these things. (There are) lots of publicly funded and foundation funded presentations. We give (students like Alika) more freedom inside the building. There isn't this preoccupation with clock hours and time-on-specific task. Many participate in the Coppin Academic Fair and Mock Trials...

Ms. W. The Coppin Academic Fair is a competition between high schools. It's an academic bowl for specific subjects. Prizes like Walkmans are given. Walbrook won first place in specific areas for a couple of years. Its an "Olympics of the Mind' type of thing.

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On Advanced Placement and Tracking

Mr. C. We used to have an Advanced Placement (AP) program but because of (cuts in) funding and restructuring and class sizes, that has gone by the wayside. We used to run programs years ago where our best English students were sent to a junior college in twelfth grade where they took English 101. As long as they were doing well, they didn't take senior English but that program has gone by the wayside. And then the Advanced Placement program came after that and some of them were able to earn credit for college. It turned out that we had few that really fit the mold, so we had to discontinue the class. But we haven't really discontinued it completely because we do it individually.

Ms. W. We still have a program with another college where 12 kids go to Morgan State and take Biology 101.

Mr. D. At the staff development session last week for English department people, the very issue (of Advanced Placement courses) came up. The Abel Foundation is offering baseline kinds of funding (for AP courses)... And the question came up: Is this a healthy thing for us, given the pedagogy of the Essential Schools because of it having implications for homogenous grouping?

Mr. J. It is homogenous grouping. It's tracking.

Mr. D. It's tracking. The reason it is important to us is that ...you have to make the distinction between program and the sociology, the culture, of the living functioning classroom and the role that these gifted kids, called "gifted", play in the operation of the classroom, the role that they play in the eyes of their peers--the tutoring. During the course of your observation the whole thing (their role) was kind of muted. People gave Alika a lot of room..., I guess because of the stranger that was near her...

Question: You are saying that the observer is not a neutral factor in this study?

Mr. D. Yeah. Somebody told me once in a bar in New Hampshire that you can come in here and drink whatever you want, but as soon as you buy a drink you are involved. That's one of the weaknesses of shadow studies.

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On a Personalized Education and the Range of Abilities

Mr. D. Alika and Daniel and Lejon ran their English classes, basically. They were the idea people for their peers, and provided largely unsolicited tutoring. And you wonder what the effect of some of this is upon the gifted child. There is a repetitive and recursive nature to tutoring people. But how does this affect the child? Is this something that can be measured? Is it educationally defensible? I believe that it is. I believe that it does have an effect upon their lives.

Mr. C. I believe that the reality of the educational program, even with the restructuring, even with the Coalition Principles, ...is that there are not a great number of students who can function at an upper level with what we already have in place. And we wind up doing a lot of group work and lot of individual work trying to motivate students who really don't do what we would like them to do.

Alika and Suzanne worked on the SAT Prep (computerized software program), and to complete this successfully with an 80 or 90% score was really quite difficult for her. For me, for that matter. The opportunity is here in any classroom, with very few exceptions, to be able to provide that kind of help. But the level of everything really sort of goes down. When we see someone like Alika who is capable of doing some of the work that we really would like to be able to teach, we give (special) assignments. Alika can work as hard as she wants on them. Most students put forth very little effort and we are happy when they do anything. We hold Alika to a different standard and I think she realizes and understands that.

Mr. J. The underlying idea of the Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools is that you structure your lecture so that you give the child with special ability beyond the mediocre (the opportunity to) to achieve. You give the child who is struggling with the basics the opportunity to achieve and to reach his potential also. So when you talk about instruction for the gifted and talented child, you can look at the structure of any lesson where you really don't have a ceiling on what the child is to achieve...you build in the challenge.

There isn't a special program (for the gifted and talented). It doesn't exist, but what does exist is the opportunity for them to achieve and you encourage them in some of the perks that come along in extracurricular activities...(which are) part of the whole total school structure. Because if the child stays two, three hours beyond the school day to work on

something or is out of the building, that is all a part of the same general education.

Mr. D. It's part of the child's growth.

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On the Purposes of Schooling

Mr. C. How were these folks (Alika) determined to be gifted and talented? Alika in ...another school setting might be a mediocre student. Alika is average in mathematics. I don't think that we think that some of these kids are so much above the rest of them that we don't try to teach them anything. Alika is a great kid. She's an avid reader. Sometimes I get on her about what she's reading. Why are you reading that Stephen King trash? I'm trying to get her to read other things than contemporary novels. She may never sit down and read Thomas Hardy. She might not like him and maybe she doesn't need to. But these are some of the things that I'm talking to her about.

Question: Do you think that if she graduates from Walbrook without ever having read Thomas Hardy, or more importantly, without ever having sat in a classroom where his work was discussed--the discussion lead by a teacher well-versed in the fundamentals of literary criticism--that she will be missing something important? If she was in (a wealthy suburban school system), she would get that exposure. Is it important?

Ms. W. Is it the process of being able to discuss that piece of literature or the literature itself? We kind of believe that it's the process that important.

Mr. C. It's the process that's important. But the fact of the situation is that when they get into a lot of colleges, they are expected to know a lot of things about a lot of authors and have the background that they don't get. I've had a lot of students come back to me and say, "I don't have any grammar...you never taught me any grammar. I'm in a remedial course at such and such university and everybody else knows what's going on and I haven't had any of it." And I think that we get caught up too often in that we are teaching the process, and I agree with the Coalition Principles and ideals, but I still think that we are really missing the boat, in part, in terms of the quality of the high school education for college-bound students.

Mr. J. No, I don't agree with that at all.

Ms. W. I disagree. There are a lot of areas in science that, because where the students are when they come in (to Walbrook), you've got to take the students who come in with what they had.

Mr. C. That's fair. You do the best you can.

Ms. W. As we move through the content areas you have to teach the students how to access information on their own. And how to think through problems in the problem-solving

process. So true, we may not get to certain points, but I think the children get an idea of how to obtain information on their own.

Mr. J. The idea is to teach that process, so no matter what they come in contact with, or where they come in contact with it, they have the tools to deal with it.

Mr. C. But there is a base of information that is necessary to be successful in an upper level college program. And our kids don't get it, unless they get it on their own from their own reading.

Mr. D. And another issue, I'm not certain that mythic criticism is an important part of Alika's education or for anybody's program. Responding to things that you read, communication, using language and literature--that's important. I'm not sure that gifted and talented programs need to deal with these issues. There's a legacy handed down to us, and we're taught that the mainstream culture is important, but I'm not convinced.

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On Preparing Students for College and Work

Mr. J. The whole educational process in gradually changing. We are all aware of that. Going back to Thomas Hardy, that may be valued right now in an academic situation on the college level. But so what? It doesn't need to be discussed at length on the high school level because somebody on the college level says you must know that. He (the college professor) can't tell you the significance of knowing it. But if you learn the process and have the tools you can take any other piece of literature that comes along and you are much better received than just happening to know about one particular author.

The colleges will adjust, they are gradually changing their standards for college admissions. We are going to get to the point where graduation will be by exhibition, and that's going to be acceptable as a evaluative tool for accepting kids into college rather than just the SAT scores or the transcripts.
But that's a problem that's going to take ten to fifteen years (to solve).

Mr. C. We are also running into a lot of backlash--too much permissiveness in admission requirements, academic and athletic requirements. The academic communities in the colleges are starting to develop a backlash about lowering the standards.

Ms. W. It's not lowering the standards. There are people who are working with Brown University. Karen Park is one of them. She is going around to different colleges and investigating what is it that they want from students. What kind of students do they like? Alverna College in Milwaukee is one--they only take demonstrations of mastery types of evidence. There's a lot going on that we don't hear about in the media.

Mr. C. But what about the complaints of business that they have to retrain every student who comes out of the high school? Nobody can work in the shops. Nobody can read

anything. What restructuring is that we have to find a way to produce graduates that are competent. We decided that the old ways don't work and we have to do something different, and I guess we are looking for a way to do that. Now we get back to high school graduates of 1991 who were not as well prepared for academic or work careers as high school students who graduated in '81.

Ms. W. But isn't that a reflection of society in general and not just the school?

Mr. J. The requirements for the job markets changed from '81 to '91. But the way we teach kids did not significantly change.

Mr. C. Take Alika. What is Alika's mission in life and how is it connected to her community? Is it more important for her to go on and be Chair of Humanities at Harvard or is it more important for her to be back at Westerton Middle School (as a teacher) helping people from her community?

Question: And who decides that?

Ms. W. It's her personal choice.

Mr. D. And what she does is enabling her to make that decision. It's Alika's choice. It's a crucial choice in urban America to be made right now.

Mr. J. She may lend the same significance to West Baltimore as she could lend to Harvard if she was the Chair of the English Department. Nothing in the two distinctions separates her program here.

Mr. D. It's our job here to make sure that we have prepared her to go in both directions.

Mr. J. We have to give her the tools to make that decision and to be competent in whatever area she chooses.

Mr. C. We see something in her that we don't see in every student.

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On Special Abilities in Different Subjects

Question: What about mathematics? It's fairly clear that some kids can move really quickly in mathematics when allowed. Does the current informal structure known as personalized education within your classes allow everything you want to do with the students who seem more mathematically apt and motivated?

Mr. J. Nothing allows me to do everything I want to do. Math tends to be one of the more difficult areas, not just because of general constraints...Math creates problems in the minds

of kids which have to be overcome. They have acquired a problem over the last 15 years. The parents have said I wasn't good in math so don't worry about it. It perpetuates (the problem). I'm fighting that. I have to turn around the course of history. The (Coalition) Principles...help kids who are somewhat like Alika to go off on their own and push forward. In math, Alika is not ahead of the group. She can work with the group. She still has competency and can experience degrees of success. When she is with the group she can bring in her reasoning ability, which is superior to some of the other students. She is still using the talent that she has.

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On Follow-up of Walbrook Graduates

Question to Mr. J. You did some follow-up on kids who have graduated Walbrook who were in the Coalition Program. What is your perception of how kids do once they leave here?

Mr. J. Generally it has been good. I think last year I visited nine or ten colleges. I talked with college professors, counselors, and advisors--people who were in charge of the students in a special programs--the advanced academic program... The biggest thing I found in most of them is that they have adjusted well to the college environment. They have become acclimated. They are not uncomfortable in a new environment. They showed competence and were more comfortable than students who had come from a traditional educational experience. The instructors and advisors were also very pleased in general with them, their ability to reason. They had the basic tools.

Now, the students still felt that they could do better. Even though they were not doing as well as they would like to do, they had their program outlined for themselves. They knew where they wanted to go and how to get there. They know what to do next to take them to a more advanced level.

Question: To get this straight--students who came from Walbrook which had no honors program, were admitted to a college honors program? Would it be fair to say that Walbrook prepares kids to function well in a college environment in affective ways--because of the freedom (at Walbrook)?

Mr. J. It's not so much the freedom. The Coalition kids that I followed, the biggest thing that they were able to get was the personalization and nurturing that allowed them to grow in self-confidence and self-esteem. So they are able to compete anywhere. They felt comfortable in speaking out. One of our students went to college and he organized a campaign for a young lady to become homecoming queen. She's a senior and he's a freshman. He ran the campaign for a senior. She came in second and only lost... 60 or 70 votes. It is amazing that a young man who went here to school, who is just 18, has the confidence that he could direct a campaign for a member of the senior class.

I've been at a couple of work sites. For instance, there was a nice young man who was

satisfied with getting a 75 (in my class)--he thought 80 was wonderful--but he didn't push himself at this level. He spent most of his time developing personal skills. He left and he didn't go to college, but went to the business world. He went to barber school. There were 18 or 19 students in his class and he was the best student in the class. He went from what we call average to excelling. The kids in his class were kind of laid back, but he developed self-confidence and graduated ahead of time and went to work. I need to go to him because he's my barber. That one example of how a child prepared himself.

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On Magnet Schools

Question: How does Walbrook compare with the city-wide (magnet schools) in the City of Baltimore? Can you guess whether Walbrook offers enough because of its unique restructured program? What if Alika had gone to the all-girl college preparatory city-wide school, Western? How do you balance that?

Mr. J. You can't unless you can look into a crystal ball.

Ms. W. At the City school, they say, "Here it is. Either you get it or you don't. Take it or leave it." I have one young man who came from the City school, and I found if I talked to him and I pushed him a little bit more, he would do very well. And he did say to me that the teachers here treat the students differently than the teachers at the city-wide school.

Mr. J. I have couple of students from the City school in my homeroom. And they have to adjust. It manifests itself in different ways. Sometimes they are a little reticent. But they, on the other hand, became a little louder and little bolder and confident. But they feel more like people. They act more like young men who are growing, who are becoming self-reliant. Even though one of them knows a lot of the things that the kids are having because he already has had a course that had lot of this material at another school, he's happy here. If he made a mistake (before) he was shattered...

Our philosophy is that small is better because you get more opportunity for that individual attention and personalization. Bigger institutions that do the factory type of education (may serve) some people who can go off from them. But so many get lost. They just don't function because they have not had the opportunity to grow.

Ms. W. Let's look at the GATE (gifted and talented) programs. I have serious personal problems with those.

Mr. J. Some of those programs need to be really reevaluated...We have had difficulty with some of them because we have had to evaluate some of the more unsuccessful products (students) of the GATE programs.

Question: Would you rather see a public school system here in Baltimore that didn't have these magnet schools? How would you handle it, because then you wouldn't have just a few

high ability kids, you would have a lot?

(The teachers concur that they would like to see the magnet-school approach eliminated.)

Mr. J. There is aura around the city wide schools.

Ms. W. Everyone seems to be in awe, but I can't understand it.

Mr. J. It's like the Ivy League schools. They (the city-wide schools) were associated with the people who became the politicians in the city. The governor went to City. The mayor went to Poly. And over the years, of course, those were the names that were attached to the schools.

Ms. W. But I think that all of the kids are about the same.

Mr. J. In many cases. But I'm speaking now of about fifteen twenty years ago. Some of the kids who went to the city-wide schools did get a better education because the better teachers manipulated their way into those schools. Some of your best teachers were there at that time.

Mr. D. Now there are more than 35 or so good teachers out there.

On Improvements for the Gifted and Talented at Walbrook

Question: Walbrook has turned the corner in offering a good education for lower ability and perhaps average kids. And affectively, this a very good school. You sense it in the students you meet in the halls. They are friendly and there is no ambivalence about wanting to be here. But is there any need to think about how to bring the general level of the educational program up? Have you gone as far as you can go, given the skills that students are bringing into Walbrook? Can you reach out more to the kids who have special abilities and motivations? Do you want to formalize it?

Mr. J. Although teachers don't really have the time, they do more anyway because of the dedication, and the delayed gratification of having students come back to thank you for doing what you did.

You need more time for individualization. If we strictly adhered to the (Coalition) Principles that we are building upon, this school, this building, would be divided into about three schools of about 400 kids each. There would be an administrator for each one. There would be about 20 - 25 kids in a room at a time, instead of 35 - 40. Large just doesn't work. We built these large monstrous buildings so that we could group (students) together and they could all do the same thing, but it doesn't work. We divided (Walbrook into two schools), but it should be three--with an administrator, counselor and secretary for each one...We are experiencing a kind of change now, going through an adjustment period where the whole school is involved (now in the Coalition). There is just more of everybody and

isn't enough time for some of the important things.

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On Student Choice

Ms. W. I wonder if eliminating choices is s good thing. It's choices.. what they enjoy...what they feel that they need. When I was in high school, you could take all kind of literature courses.

Mr. J. In college freshman year, the students have a structured course outline. These are the requirements you need to become a functioning college student. Then you go off later and make some choices. At the ninth grade level, there a few who are mature enough (to make academic choices) but they are minuscule in number.

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A Final Comment from a Teacher

Mr. J. One final comment. Walbrook in its present format as a Coalition school does provide a challenging education and a success rate for those students who do have what are in quotes called exceptional abilities, as well as for those students who do have average ability. Case closed.

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But is it? Mr. D. confides that reading a draft of this study has caused him to think more about the issues raised here. As a consequence, he currently has asked Alika (who is no longer in his English class) to read The Invisible Man, which will be followed by The Stranger. Mr. D. also says he's having a big problem deciding whether or not to order The Scarlet Letter for his tenth grade English classes. Why? The potential objections of religious or Afro-centric groups from the Walbrook community? No, it is because the reading level of many of his students is not yet up that which the novel requires. Should he order it for those who can read it, or not?

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of what to do with the gifted and talented students in Coalition schools is one which has arisen before. Is the Coalition philosophy antithetical to special programs for the gifted and talented, since Principle #3 states that the goals of the school should apply to all students? (Left untouched here, is the issue of how special education children fare at Walbrook--remembering how the curriculum has been constricted to exclude electives, including vocational classes.)

At another Coalition school, the interpretation of this goal has resulted in the elimination of ninth grade honors English and Social Studies (Cushman, 1990). The principle at Parkway South High School in suburban New Jersey explained that:

> ...advanced students are not being stripped away of their challenges; they will simply mingle in class as in real life with others of different abilities. As in life, they will

> take challenges to a more advanced level the more capable they are--and in doing so will motivate and support their fellow students of every stripe. One learns best, he points out, when one must explain something to another person, work in a group with others, stand before people to demonstrate something in a clear and interesting way.

What this fails to account for is the fact that the students of highest ability do not always choose the best or most appropriate challenges, especially without a great deal of individual guidance from teachers. They may be smart, but they are not always wise. They may do the minimum required, they may spend countless hours perfecting low level assignments, or contrary to the sentiment stated above, prefer to surround themselves with other high ability students within a heterogenous class.

Alika, for instance, has adopted a pattern at Walbrook which includes doing exactly what she believes the teacher wants but not more, associating with the brightest and most motivated, and doing a great deal of unguided and unsophisticated pleasure reading. Only in the mathematics courses and Mock Trial Competition, an extra-curricular activity, does she seem to be operating at full throttle, intellectually.

The Coalition philosophy seems to include a remedy for this situation in Principle # 4, which states that teaching and learning should be personalized, with teachers and principals unreservedly responsible for what is studied, how time is spent, and what materials and pedagogies are used. In order to do this, no teacher should have a class load of more than eighty students (Chion-Kenney, 1987), although Walbrook Coalition teachers have heavier student loads than this, closer to 100 to 120 students.

The egalitarian philosophy espoused through the Coalition, and often echoed fervently by the Walbrook staff, hardly seems fair to the best and the brightest who must be the shining examples, motivators, and teachers of the less able; unless they too are helped by their teachers to establish appropriate goals for themselves. Alika, and especially Harriet, could get more from their Walbrook education if they had an better idea of what to strive for. At Parkway High mentioned above, an "honors program" was established whereby talented and motivated students remain in heterogenous classes, but those who wish might contract to do parallel, but more advanced work, in any class in order to receive an honors grade.

But Mrs. F., the Coalition coordinator at Walbrook points out that, "(Honors classes) became an issue in the building. We started a system with all of the classes in the building being honors classes and kids could get honors credit based upon the achievement level. With this expansion, it's almost like were starting all over where we started in '85, ---at square one...so many things that we tried to do that worked at different points, we gave up with the move because of a different structure... This year we have honors classes but we do not have the numbers of honors courses in the curriculum that we had. All kids had access to doing any course at honors level. The schedulers took that out."

Ideally, there ought to be sufficient flexibility in the Coalition philosophy to allow all

students to have an appropriately challenging education. But in practice, many of the classes at Walbrook seem organized to help the many students who have had to overcome the myriad obstacles to learning and achievement endemic to our inner cities, just to stay in school and get a diploma. At Walbrook, high ability students are accommodating to a curriculum designed for students who are struggling. Walbrook's central goal is to not write off any students, but to help them through, if they have the courage and willingness to work.

Mrs. F. says the good kids are going to make it, no matter what. She believes that the school or the instructor has little impact on them. Rather, she says if you have a choice in the allocation of resources, give it to the kids who need it most. She points out that this is a statewide problem, and that all kids should have the same opportunities and nurturing. Even Mr. D. believes at a motivated person can do well anywhere, and that the curriculum is merely a means to an end.

Fortunately, for Alika and her friends, the actions of Mr. D. and Mrs. F. belie their rhetoric, for these two individuals stand out as people sensitive and responsive to the needs of talented and motivated students. They provide opportunities that will allow those Walbrook students who seem to have the most potential to see beyond the neighborhood in order to chart their futures. It would seem that the students of high ability deserve no less personal attention than the rest, especially if they are intended to be role models for the others. For the reality is that they do have a choice. They could be attending the Baltimore magnet schools designed for especially for the college-bound. But Alika is happy at Walbrook.

It is a fine school, all the more to be admired because the principal, Dr. Sam Billups, and his staff have lifted the school out of the quagmire of American urban education long before external events required them to do so. They are building a program based on a viable new reform philosophy. Now that other inner-city schools are being forced to recognize their necrotic state and reorganize, Walbrook, Billups says, is "like a rabbit in a briar patch"--well ahead of the game and moving every day toward a program that serves each student according to his or her abilities and needs.

Dr. Sam Billups' next targets will be to raise the general academic level of all classes at Walbrook, and to provide more academic opportunities for students who are motivated and able. But this, he says, must be accomplished without resorting to tracking. If anybody can do this, it probably is Sam Billups and his staff.

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